

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: August 8, 2013

Agenda Item: Partial Assignment of Sourdough Creek Conservation Easement

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Endorsement

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 5 minutes

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Background: The Sourdough Creek Conservation Easement (CE) was donated to FWP in 1980 by Robert Seise and covers 230 acres in the foothills of the Gallatin Mountain Range about five miles south of Bozeman. In addition to habitat conservation, the CE provides for a parking area for the popular Mystic Lake trailhead.

During recent years the Gallatin Valley Land Trust, Forest Service and Gallatin County have conducted significant improvements to the trailhead area to restore the Bozeman Creek floodplain and improve recreational access. As part of the parking-area development at the site, ownership of a 1.3-acre parcel covered by the conservation easement was donated by the Sourdough Creek landowner to GVLТ.

FWP now proposes to assign administration of the conservation easement on this 1.3-acre parcel to GVLТ. GVLТ would in turn donate the underlying land, and assign this portion of the easement, to the Forest Service. The purposes of this proposed action are: (1) to remove FWP from oversight of 1.3 acres of the Mystic Lake trailhead parking lot; (2) to facilitate the transfer of an additional five acres at the site from the Gallatin Valley Land Trust to the Forest Service; and (3) to provide for unified ownership and management of the trailhead area.

The remaining 229 acres of the Sourdough Creek Conservation Easement will continue to be administered by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks for the purposes of habitat conservation and open-space preservation. The proposed action will have no effect on the management of this acreage.

Public Involvement Process & Results: On July 18, 2013, FWP released an environmental assessment (EA), describing the proposed action and reviewing its environmental impacts. The EA does not identify any adverse consequences that would result from the proposed action. Public comments are due by August 16.

Alternatives and Analysis: The no-action alternative, under which FWP would not convey the conservation easement over the 1.3-acre parcel, continues the status quo. This would not provide the potential for unified Forest Service ownership and management of the trailhead and parking lot area.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: FWP recommends that the Commission endorse the Department's course of action to pursue its evaluation and take public comment on the proposed partial assignment of the Sourdough Creek Conservation Easement.

Proposed Motion: I move that the Department complete its environmental assessment and decision-notice process for the proposed Partial Assignment of the Sourdough Creek Conservation Easement, and bring the results of that process back to the Commission for a final decision.